

Fire Management Planning and Coordination

Coordinated fire planning and management has long been a priority for the Greater Yellowstone Coordinating Committee (GYCC). Good coordination and planning is not only critical for the federal land units, it's equally important to work with states and counties to ensure integrated fire management programs. A wildfire recognizes no administrative boundaries! This is particularly important to consider as development increases on private land within and adjacent to public lands.

The overarching goal for GYCC fire management and coordination is safe and efficient management of wildland and prescribed fires. Due to the large amount of undeveloped land, wilderness and national parks, and the recognition of the vital role fire plays in the ecosystem, wildland fire use and prescribed fires will be the primary tools for managing vegetation and reducing fuels over a large part of the GYA. (Wildland fire use is defined as the management of naturally ignited wildland fires to accomplish specific resource management objectives as outlined in approved fire management plans. Prescribed fires are intentionally ignited fires designed to accomplish management objectives.)

One of the major post-1988 fire season recommendations was to improve coordinated planning and joint management of fire activities across jurisdictional boundaries. In response to this recommendation, the GYCC published "The Greater Yellowstone Area Interagency Fire Management and Coordination Guide." Originally published in 1990, the guide was revised in 1992, 1995, and in 2000.

The Greater Yellowstone Fire Managers team serves as the primary means for coordinating fire management planning and suppression. Primary activities and goals include:

- Providing specific operating principles and procedures to assure effective interagency coordination and management of wildland fires and prescribed fires in the GYA;
- Providing advice and consultation to managers for potentially large and/or complex fire incidents within the GYA;
- Sharing information through preparation of a GYA situation report that describes current fire activity, resource availability, and future outlook;
- Developing unit fire management plans that outline various strategies for managing or suppressing fires. A key role of the team is to ensure that comprehensive joint planning occurs across the boundaries of neighboring units to bring about completion of mutually acceptable fire management plans.
- Coordinating planning and execution of prescribed burns;



Left: "Fire shelter" on the Beaver Creek Fire, Gallatin National Forest. Right: Blind Fire, Bridger-Teton National Forest.

- Joint training and coordinated fire prevention and awareness programs.

In response to the 2000 fire season, the President directed federal agencies to take action to reduce immediate hazards to communities in the wildland urban interface, and to ensure that fire management planning and fire fighting personnel and resources are prepared for extreme fire conditions in the future. Primary goals of the National Fire Plan and their implications for the GYA are:

- **Firefighting.** Increase fire-fighting capability for initial attack, extended attack, and large fire support that will help reduce the number of small fires that grow into large fires, better protect resources, reduce the threat to local communities, and reduce the cost of large fire suppression. Within the GYA, many new fire positions will be added and helicopter and engine capability increased.
- **Rehabilitation and Restoration.** The goal is to restore landscapes and rebuild communities damaged by the wildfires of 2000. Within the GYA, 468 wildland fires burned 262,871 acres in 2000. Large fires did occur on most units, however communities were not threatened to the same extent that occurred in western Montana. Rehabilitation and restoration plans are in place for the large fires.
- **Hazardous Fuel Reduction.** Invest in projects to reduce fuel risk near the wildland urban interface. For example, on the Gallatin National Forest, fuel reduction projects are planned for the Cooke City/Silver Gate area, West Yellowstone, and the Gallatin River Canyon.
- **Work directly with communities to ensure adequate protection.** For example, the Bridger-Teton National Forest is working with local counties to identify areas at risk.

For additional information on the National Fire Plan go to: <http://www.fs.fed.us/fire/> or <http://www.nps.gov/fire/>